



For Immediate Release:

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Vashon Island Commemorates World AIDS Day With Four Days of Events

For a brief moment each year AIDS enters public awareness across the globe as World AIDS Day is commemorated on December 1st. For most, it will be just another day in the hectic runup to the Christmas holiday. For others, it will be a time to remember the dark days of the epidemic's early years and those tragically lost to AIDS.

Tiny Vashon Island intends to bring attention to the latter by mounting a four-day series of unique events as part of Vashon World AIDS Day 2018.

**Thursday November 29: "Stonewall To Border Wall: Learning from AIDS Activism"
Hosted at Vashon Island High School 7:00pm**

Long forgotten is the context in which the epidemic unfolded in this country. AIDS was the "gay plague" in the public mind. Gays "got what they deserved" was a common sentiment. Fear and misunderstanding merged with outright hatred of homosexuals created a toxic atmosphere of apathy and inaction. President Reagan never uttered the word AIDS publicly until five years into the epidemic.

It was activists, many in their 20's and 30's, who rose up to confront the bigotry and inaction. AIDS activists created grassroots organizations and mobilized in ways never seen before. Their legacy is still seen today in healthcare and service institutions across the globe and in the way all drugs are tested and approved by the FDA. Theirs is a model for activism that quite literally has saved millions of lives worldwide.

Friday November 30: “Lost To AIDS” Art Installation Opening @ Vashon Center for the Arts 6:00 pm

Art drove the AIDS activist movement. Long before the Internet, cell phones and social media, powerful imagery and slogans such as *Silence=Death* inspired action and galvanized this minority as they literally fought for their lives. *Lost To AIDS* is a collaboration between Vashon Island High School art students and transmedia artist and activist Peter Serko. The exhibit will acknowledge and celebrate Islanders who died of AIDS, drawing inspiration from the iconic art that emerged from activist movement.

Saturday December 1: “Crazy Little Thing Called Love” A Musical Tribute to Freddie Mercury @ Open Space for Arts and Community 7:00 pm Tickets: openspacevashon.com

Singer Freddie Mercury’s death in 1991 was a milestone in public awareness of AIDS much like the death of celebrities Rock Hudson and Liberace. No longer were AIDS sufferers anonymous “others” but someone respected and admired. The evening promises to be both entertaining and informative.

Sunday December 2: Staged Reading of “The Normal Heart” by Drama Dock at Open Space for Arts and Community 7:00 pm

The Normal Heart by playwright and activist Larry Kramer was the first AIDS based play premiering in 1985 at The Public Theatre in New York City. The play chronicles major events in the early years of the epidemic exposing the devastation of this new disease.

November - December: “We Remember” Oral History Project

We Remember is a collaboration with Voice of Vashon Radio to gather and record stories from islanders touched by AIDS. While no doubt painful to recall, we believe these stories are important to give voice to, to speak out loud, and to preserve. Much like recollections from the Holocaust, they represent the collective memory of a difficult time in our history, a time when fear of a terrible disease combined with bigotry and ignorance stigmatizing and marginalizing the sick and dying.

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